

Anti-corruption laws toughened in Cuba

Acting leader Raúl Castro has ordered harsher penalties for public officials who break labor rules.

The Miami Herald
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Ratcheting up his fight against corruption and mismanagement in Cuba, interim leader Raúl Castro has signed a decree requiring tough, swift and long-lasting punishment for public officials who violate labor rules.

Decree 25½007, published Wednesday in the Official Gazette, covers the enforcement of earlier decrees designed to counter official corruption and illegal but widespread workplace activities, including petty thievery of public supplies, 4-hour work days and hiring friends for good jobs.

'NEGLIGENT'

The decree brands as "a collaterally responsible" any official whose job is on the same level as violators but doesn't punish them or report them to authorities, saying they are guilty of a "lack of exigency" or "negligent."

Disciplinary measures also will be taken against any official who hires or promotes "subordinates or equals . . . for the mere reason of friendship or familial relationship or any other motivation other than social interest."

Those who allow subordinates to do so will also will be disciplined. Administrators also will not be allowed to demote or accept the resignation of violators before the allegations against them are settled.

Sanctions include dismissal and a total ban on any official employment. Punishment will be meted out "directly and with immediate effect," and authorities will track violators to ensure the punishments are being observed.

Penalties will be applied "independently from any criminal process," and any appeals will not delay the start of the sanctions, the decree indicates.

STARTS SEPT. 1

The decree will take effect Sept. 1, six months after the enactment of a new resolution aimed at cracking down on some aspects of the notorious labor inefficiencies in Cuba's government-dominated economy: workers who show up late or leave early, who filch supplies from their jobs or accept bribes to help clients.

According to a government report, more than half of the 22,692 audits of state enterprises and service centers conducted between January and August 2006 unearthed problems and legal irregularities.

During his 13-month interim mandate, Raúl Castro has stepped up -- with fewer speeches and greater pragmatism -- the campaign against corruption launched by his brother Fidel in November 2005.

REASONS

The government has acknowledged corruption to be a problem that could eventually undermine the revolution, but it has run into problems enforcing the new labor regulations.

Cubans have argued that they often cannot show up for work on time because of the broken public-transportation system, and that their extremely low salaries -- average of \$16 a month -- force them into illegal activities to survive.